

The "Apostolic Constitutions" (vii. 49) preserve an early Christian grace, which is not without interest: "Blessed be Thou, O Lord, who hast nourished me from my youth, who givest food to all flesh. Fill our hearts with joy and gladness, that we, always having all sufficiency, may abound unto every good work, in Christ Jesus our Lord, through Whom to Thee be glory, honour, and power for ever. Amen."

Here is another, which Chrysostom tells us was used in certain religious fraternities:—

"Glory be to Thee, O Lord, O Holy One; Glory be to Thee, O King, for Thou hast given to us food for our gladness. Fill us with the Holy Spirit, that we may be found well pleasing in thy sight, and not ashamed when Thou shalt render to every man according to his work."

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NOTES ON THE EPISTLE TO THE ROMANS.

CHAPTER II.

HAVING thus described the state of the Heathen world, St. Paul proceeds to draw an inference from what he has said on the subject. "Therefore thou art inexcusable, O Man!" To most ordinary readers this inference appears very strange; and it does indeed involve a serious difficulty, which few of the Commentators have shewn themselves able fully to appreciate. It is not till Verse 17 of this Chapter that St. Paul expressly declares whom he has been addressing in the words "O Man!" We see, however, that it must be one who represents either the Heathen society, of which he has been just speaking, or the Jews. But as it is certain that the Heathen society

did not in any proper sense sit in judgment on itself, it can be only the Jew who is here addressed. If the Apostle had put his argument in a logical form, it would have run something like this: A man is inexcusable who sits in judgment on offences which he himself commits. But the Jew does sit in judgment on the offences of the Heathen world, of which he himself partakes; and, therefore, is inexcusable and self-condemned. That is perfectly correct in form, but it takes for granted the proposition that the Jews were guilty of the same offences as the Heathen whom they condemned. St. Paul, however, can hardly have meant to impute to the Jews a corruption like that which prevailed among the Heathen. We are sure that whatever cases of this kind may have existed must have formed very rare exceptions to the general rule; and that ordinary Jews were as blameless in their outward conduct, and lived as decent respectable lives as St. Paul himself before his conversion.

The Pharisees, who incurred the severest rebukes from our Lord and before Him from John the Baptist, though, when considered in themselves, a large class, were but a small one when compared with the great bulk of the Jewish people. This would follow from the fact that they filled the highest places in society, and were looked up to with reverence as teachers, exemplars, and guides. Moreover their characteristic sin was not any form of gross and scandalous immorality, but of hypocrisy. They pretended to a super-eminent degree of sanctity and strictness, which they used as a cloak to cover their greediness and ambition, "Devouring widows' houses, and, for a pretence, making long prayers."

The sin of the people at large was one rather of omission than of commission. Absorbed in an empty formality, they neglected the two great commandments of the Law,—Love to God and to their neighbour. This, however, is not that with which they are charged by St. Paul; and the offences to which he refers in the 22nd and following verses of Chapter i. must be considered only as illustrations of his general statement as to that which made their condemnation of the Heathen inexcusable. At verse 22 the Apostle says of the Heathen that, *professing themselves to be wise, they became fools*. This has appeared to some to relate to the Heathen philosophy, and has suggested the question, whether St. Paul was acquainted with it; and if so, what view he took of it. The quotations which he gives from Greek poetry in his speech at the Areopagus, and in the Epistle to Titus and the First Epistle to the Corinthians, Chap. xv. 33 (which is probably not taken from any poet, but from a familiar proverb), would not be sufficient ground for an inference as to the extent of his acquaintance with Greek literature; and the education he had received at Tarsus, and at the feet of Gamaliel, does not seem likely to have cultivated a taste for its beauty.

As to the subject-matter,—he could have taken very little interest in the speculations of the Alexandrian philosophy, which he would consider as vain and presumptuous; or in the controversies of the Stoics and Epicureans whom he encountered at Athens, or of the Peripatetics and of the New Academy, which he would have looked upon as little better than empty trifling. If he had been acquainted with the

writings of Plato, one is loth to believe that he would not have been favourably impressed by the numerous approximations to Christian doctrine which he would have found there. But, still, he would have measured their value by the effect they produced on the hearts and lives of men ; and finding that, for this purpose, they were almost totally inefficient, and did not even aim at such a result as to the great mass of mankind, it would seem that he must have regarded them as almost utterly worthless. The question, however, arising from Verse 22 is, as to the Apostle's meaning in the words, "*professing themselves to be wise, they became fools ;*" and we are led to ask what is the *wisdom* and what the *folly* which he is speaking of. It appears from the context that the wisdom was that by which, neglecting the witness which God had given of Himself in the works of Creation, they were led astray into idolatry, and indulged their *vain imaginations* in the invention of their fabulous mythology. This, however, it must be observed, was not the work of the philosophers, who, on the contrary, were always sceptical and hostile to it, but partly of the poets, as to whom Herodotus observes, that Homer and Hesiod were the founders of Greek religion, and partly of the people itself, which was continually moulding the traditions they received into new shapes.

The *wisdom* (*σοφία*) which they are said to have professed seems to refer, not to philosophy, but to that excellence in science and art in which they were undoubtedly without a rival in the ancient world. Their *folly* consisted in their making this wisdom subservient to a vain creed and to a superstitious worship.

VERSE 2.—*We are sure that the judgment of God is according unto truth against them which commit such things.* But it would not be *according unto truth* if they who commit such things were to escape with impunity.

VERSE 3.—Strong emphasis is to be laid on the word *thou*,—"that *thou* shalt escape the judgment of God," while others, not more guilty, are punished.

VERSE 4.—*Or despisest thou?* is as much as to say, art thou not shewing that thou despisest the riches? &c.

VERSE 5.—The word translated *against*, is properly *in*, the day of wrath. But the Apostle had in view the completion of the *treasure of wrath*, which would not take place before the day of wrath, or the last judgment.

VERSE 6.—*Who will render to every man according to his deeds.* Some have found it difficult to reconcile this language with what the Apostle elsewhere says as to justifying faith; but there is no real contradiction between the Apostle's silence and his express teaching on this subject. He traces the orbit in which all who are to attain to eternal life must be found moving: but he says nothing here as to the nature of the force by which they are to be kept in that orbit.

VERSE 8.—The word rendered *contentious* (ἐξέπιθελος) is totally mistranslated, on the supposition that it has something to do with the word ἐπίς, strife, with which it is wholly unconnected. It comes from ἐπιθος, a day-labourer, a hireling, one who labours for hire: and it is applied by Homer to mowers and reapers who work for hire. The word ἐπιθelia is used of those who canvass for office, and form parties and cabals to accomplish their ends. Hence, in the largest sense, it will signify those who labour for their own private and selfish ends; and it is remarkable that

this should be contrasted with the patient continuance in well doing, as containing in itself every kind of evil. The words rendered *unto them that are contentious*, would be more properly translated *to them who are of a mercenary spirit*.

VERSE 11.—The words, *there is no respect of persons with God*, complete the exposure of the presumption which led the Jews to imagine that they should escape the judgment of God under cover of their religious privileges.

Here, however, a question may arise whether this statement is consistent with the priority assigned to the Jews by the words, "*the Jew first, and also the Gentile.*" But, in the first place, it seems clear that the priority cannot relate to the order of time, since it is to be declared at the final judgment; and then it can only refer to the nature and amount of the reward or punishment to be received by Jew and Gentile. We could easily understand that it would be required by the Divine justice that the disobedient Jew should incur a heavier punishment than the reckless Gentile, who had not neglected or abused the like privileges. But it would seem as if, on the same principle, the Gentile who had lived up to the light vouchsafed to him should receive a higher reward than the Jew; whereas it appears that the obedient Jew is still to have some advantage over him in this respect, and is to stand higher in the Divine favour. This is, however, not a greater difficulty than is involved in the original election of a people appointed to be the depository of a special Divine Revelation; and the privileges with which the Jews were favoured were designed for the general benefit of mankind.

VERSE 12.—*As many as have sinned without law, shall also perish without law.* As many as have sinned without the knowledge of the (Mosaic) law shall perish, but not because they will be tried by that law or according to its rule. And as many as have sinned in the law, or while subject to the law, shall be judged by the law; and the reason given for this in Verse 13 is, that at the final judgment the question will not be as to the hearing, but as to the doing, of the law. The hearing of the law is here mentioned, because it was generally known, not through reading, but through the hearing of it when read in the synagogues.

Here in our Version begins a parenthesis, which is made to include Verses 14, 15. Some have begun this parenthesis as far back as Verse 5. The better course seems to confine it to Verses 14, 15, so that Verse 16 should describe the time at which the doers of the law shall be justified, to the exclusion of those who are hearers of it only, as the day when God shall judge the secrets of men, by Jesus Christ according to the Gospel preached by St. Paul.

VERSE 14.—*Do by nature*: that is, without the aid of any such Revelation as was made to the Jews, and only in obedience to the dictates of their conscience, which stood to them in the stead of the Mosaic law, so that they might be said to be a law unto themselves.

VERSE 15.—*Which shew the work of the law written in their hearts*: that is, inasmuch as they shew that the work of the law, the course of conduct

prescribed by the law, is written in their hearts; the evidence of this fact, given by their actions, being confirmed by the inward witness of their conscience, and also by the judgments which they pronounced in accusation or excuse of one another.

VERSE 17.—*Thou restest in the law*: thou placest thy reliance on the law as thy distinguishing privilege, and makest thy boast of God, pridest thyself upon God, as enjoying his special favour in the knowledge of his will and the discernment of things *that are more excellent* in which thou hast been *instructed out of the law*.

VERSE 20.—*Which hast the form of knowledge and of the truth in the law*. It is a total misconception of the Apostle's argument to suppose that the *form* is contrasted with the *substance* and *reality*, as in the Second Epistle to Timothy (Chap. iii. 5). Some are said *to have a form of godliness, but to deny the power thereof*. Here "form" is used in an entirely different sense. The form of a thing is that by means of which it is perceived, either by the senses or by the mind. As the impression made by a seal, or an image reflected by a glass, so the form of knowledge and of the truth contained in the law is that distinct exhibition of knowledge and of the truth which the law presents. The Jew is said to have the form as something outside of himself and embodied in the law.

VERSE 24.—The passage referred to appears to be taken from Isaiah (Chap. lii. 5): *My name continually, every day, is blasphemed*. The Gentiles judge of God by the the character of his worshippers.

VERSE 25.—The outward sign without the thing signified is worse than worthless; but the thing sig-



nified retains all its value, though separate from the outward sign, when the separation is the effect, not of human self-will, but of a Divine appointment.

VERSE 26.—*Shall not his uncircumcision be counted for circumcision?* that is, be accepted as equivalent to it.

VERSE 27.—*And shall not uncircumcision which is by nature, if it fulfil the law:* that is, Shall not the uncircumcision, which fulfils the law without any other aid than that which is granted to all mankind, judge thee?—*Judge thee*, by putting thee to shame for the abuse of thy peculiar privileges.—*Who by the letter and circumcision dost transgress the law:* that is, notwithstanding that thou hast the privilege of a written law and a visible ordinance. The preposition in, *διὰ γράμματος καὶ περιτομῆς*, signifies, according to the usage of classical Greek writers, the state of things or circumstances in or under which anything is done, as in the case of a march accompanied by music.

VERSE 28.—*For he is not a Jew which is one outwardly.* To Jewish readers this assertion, which to Christians, in the light of the Sermon on the Mount sounds self-evident and almost commonplace, must have appeared to be the wildest of paradoxes. For what is a Jew which is one outwardly? He is one who is seen to be living in the observance of all the precepts of the Levitical law, such as the sabbatical rest, the festivals and fasts, the abstinence from certain kinds of food, the ablution of persons and things, and the like, by which he was conspicuously distinguished from all around him. And these were the things on which he set the highest value, both as his clearest title to the Divine favour and as raising him above the rest of mankind. Whereas St. Paul here

teaches that they did not give him the right to the name of a Jew at all, and that this right must depend on something entirely different : that is, a certain disposition of the heart and state of the conscience which was beyond the reach of any human eye ; and that the true circumcision is not that which is visible in the flesh and enjoined by the law, but that which is effected in the heart by the power of the Holy Ghost.

The last words of the Chapter should be, not "*whose praise is not of men, but of God ;*" but, "the praise of which is not of men, but of God ;" the praise, that is of which thing, referring to all that has gone before, consists not in the applause of men but in the approbation of God. With this we may compare the words of Revelation ii. 9, "*I know the blasphemy of them which say that they are Jews, and are not, but are the synagogue of Satan,*" &c.

St. Paul's main object in Chapter ii. has been to shew that, notwithstanding the licentiousness and depravity which prevailed in the Heathen world, it afforded the Jews no just ground for boasting or self-complacency, when they compared their own moral condition with that of the Gentiles, inasmuch as all that distinguished them from other men was an outward show of religion, which was utterly worthless when unaccompanied by a corresponding inward disposition, which alone could render it acceptable to God, who is *a searcher of hearts, and no respecter of persons*. He now proceeds to guard himself against misapprehensions and to meet various objections which might be raised by Jewish adversaries.